

These books spread holiday joy

Mia Geiger

For the Washington Post

Books might not be the first item on the your child's wish list for the holidays. But they just might be a gift they turn to again and again, long after all those batteries need to be replaced or the toys no longer hold their luster. These books add joy to the holiday season and beyond.

"THE GREAT SPRUCE"

By John Duvall, illustrated by Rebecca Gibbon

Alec loves climbing the giant spruce outside his house, and he loves hearing his grandfather explain how, many years ago, he replanted the then-tiny tree from a shady part of the forest to a sunny spot near their house. When townspeople see how beautiful the tree is, they ask if they can chop it down and place it in the town square during Christmas. Alec finds a way to save the tree while still allowing it to be enjoyed by the community — relaying a message of conservationism in a kid-friendly way. Soft colored-pencil drawings and saturated acrylic ink illustrations give the artwork depth, warmth and vitality.

"KWANZAA"

By Rebecca Pettiford

Kids eager to learn about Kwanzaa can find lots to look at in this book, from the upbeat photographs of families celebrating to the rich, bold colors on each page. The slim volume answers questions such as "What is Kwanzaa?" and "What does

Kwanzaa mean?" followed by concise, easy-to-understand answers. Originally published in 2014 and now available in paperback, the book includes a short picture glossary.

"A HANUKKAH WITH MAZEL"

By Joel Edward Stein, illustrated by Elisa Vavouri

Misha, a talented yet poor painter, lives alone in an Eastern European village and has no one to spend Hanukkah with. One day he finds a hungry cat in his barn. Though he has very little to eat, he shares what he has with the cat, whom he names Mazel. "I think I'll call you Mazel. You're certainly a very lucky cat to have wandered out of the cold and into my barn," he says. The two happily celebrate Hanukkah, even though Misha has no candles for the menorah and just a few potatoes with which to make latkes. A knock on the door the next day brings a friendly peddler with surprising news. The old-world charm of the drawings combines harmoniously with the holiday tale emphasizing the power of kindness and compassion.

"THE DOLL PEOPLE'S CHRISTMAS"

By Ann M. Martin and Laura Godwin, illustrated by Brett Helquist

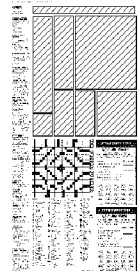
Based on the characters in The Doll People series enjoyed by tweens, this new book is geared to the younger set. Two main characters set the stage: Annabelle Doll, who is part of a delicate Victorian doll

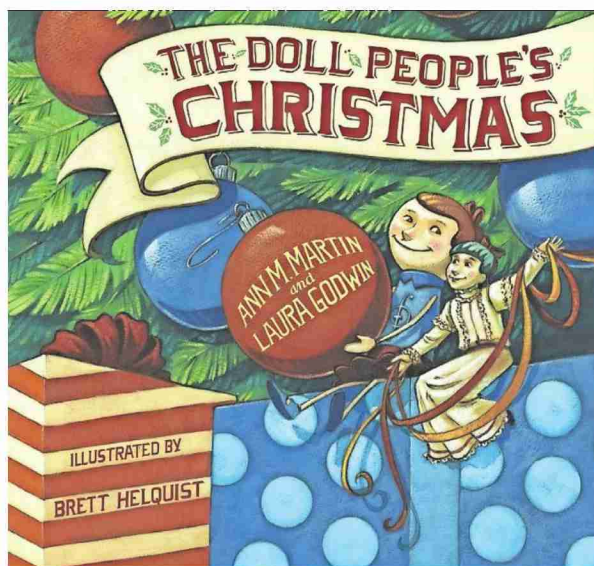
set; and Tiffany Funcraft, part of a family of modern plastic dolls. The dolls belong to sisters Kate and Nora Palmer, and, when the girls aren't around, the dolls come to life. When the dolls see that Kate accidentally breaks the angel that was supposed to top the tree, they're devastated. More mishaps follow and the dolls are sad, thinking the perfect Christmas they planned is ruined. But a surprise event and a little introspection ensures a happy holiday. The details in the full-page drawings, as well as the unexpected turns in the story, will capture kids' attention.

"POTATOES AT TURTLE ROCK"

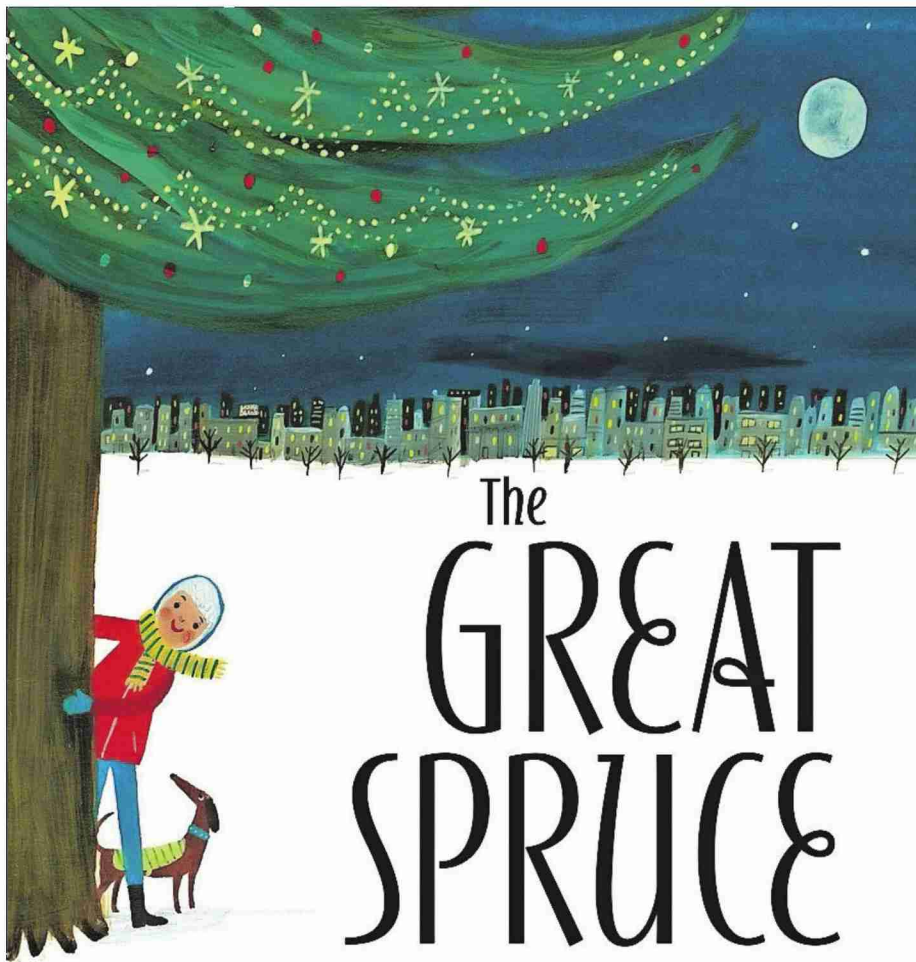
By Susan Schnur and Anna Schnur-Fishman; illustrated by Alexandra Steele-Morgan

Annie, her brother, Lincoln, and her parents prepare to celebrate Hanukkah as they usually do when it snows — with a trek through the forest. Annie has planned four stops: Old Log, Squeezy Cave, Billy Goat's Bridge and Turtle Rock. Each one offers a chance to sing songs, say blessings and talk about the meaning of the holiday. At the last stop, Annie surprises her family with hot baked potatoes, butter, salt and maple syrup, along with spoons for scooping snow. "Yum!" says Lincoln. "Baked potatoes and snow cones." It's a fun twist on traditional stories about the holiday.





In "The Doll People's Christmas," by Ann M. Martin and Laura Godwin, a surprise event and a little introspection ensure a happy holiday. *Disney-Hyperion*



The GREAT SPRUCE

John Duvall *illustrated by* Rebecca Gibbon

"The Great Spruce," by John Duvall relays a message of conservationism in a kid-friendly way. *G.P. Putnam's Sons*